



New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee 1965-2015 *CELEBRATING 50 YEARS IN STATUTE*



Message from the Chair:

The Feds Get It Right

Our elected leaders in Washington recently came together in a bipartisan effort to enact the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This new federal law, which replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB), essentially puts states and districts back in control of education.

For all of its innovative contributions to data-driven accountability at the time, NCLB had some serious unintended consequences—from an unachievable metric of success based on proficiency rather than student growth, to an out of control bureaucracy that siphoned resources away from the classroom. Seeking relief from these issues, states were forced into a waiver process that gave the U.S. Secretary of Education undue influence over state academic standards and policies. Thankfully, such problems are now a thing of the past.

So, what does the ESSA mean for our state? In many ways, New Mexico and the Public Education Department (PED) are already ahead of the curve because of the actions we'd taken under our NCLB waiver. For example, New Mexico already replaced adequate yearly progress (AYP) with a school grading system based on student growth, and I had the honor of sponsoring LESC-endorsed legislation to repeal references to AYP throughout our statutes. In addition, the state has moved beyond the federal definition of highly qualified teachers by measuring teacher effectiveness through an updated evaluation system and providing flexibility for the most effective teachers to apply effective teaching strategies in related content areas.

In other ways, our state has a chance to shape new policies that will work best for us, the way it should have been from the start. The issue of testing I discussed in last month's message is one example. The ESSA allows states to create their own testing

testing opt-out laws, although school accountability systems are still required to take test participation rates below 95 percent into consideration. However, states and local districts will now be empowered to decide what happens in schools that miss such targets, a process which allows us to consider parental decisions for a child's education and which does not jeopardize funding when those decisions run counter to what the federal government thinks is best.

While we are replacing NCLB, what we are not leaving behind is an increased focus on student performance and accountability for schools. States still have an obligation to test their students, break out the assessment data for demographic subgroups to promote equity, and institute a school-accountability system – all of which New Mexico has been doing and will continue to do. Rather than relying on overly prescriptive, one-size-fits-none federal mandates, the responsibility shifts to local school districts to use their own evidence-based policies in support of struggling schools that are in the bottom 5 percent of state rankings or graduate fewer than two-thirds of their students.

Congress and the President deserve praise for working across party lines to enact a law that once again imposes limits on the federal role in education and instead empowers states, local districts, and parents to meet the needs of their students. We at the state and local level now have a responsibility to make the most of this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Representative Dennis J. Roch
Chair

Public School Support Budget Request: The Public Education Department (PED) submitted the budget request for next year's public education spending at the beginning of the month. The request totals \$2.88 billion or \$133 million more than FY16. At the LFC hearing, Secretary Skandera indicated the budget request was developed with an emphasis on closing the achievement gap, ensuring funding is directed to proven programs that lead to improved student achievement, and providing resources to assist those schools most in need. LESC will hear the department's budget request on Wednesday, December 16th at 10:00 am.

The department's request is based on August revenue projections of \$293 million in new money in FY17, but the projection was decreased in December to only \$232 million in new money.

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“Budget Request” — continued

While the request maintained the share of funding for public education when compared to the overall executive budget request, it shrinks the share of formula funding from 91.5 percent of education appropriations to 88.7 percent and grows the share of categorical and initiatives spending to just below 12 percent from 8.5 percent.

The department requested funding increases for the program cost – the amount allocated to school districts and charter schools through the formula – for enrollment growth units, insurance, fixed costs, and a third increase in as many years to level one teacher salaries to \$36 thousand.

Requests for categorical appropriations total \$170 million, an increase of \$40 million, though \$19.5 million in requests for prekindergarten classrooms and school buses duplicates PED’s request for capital outlay funding. For the past few years, prekindergarten classrooms and buses have been funded with supplemental severance tax bonds; however, falling gas and oil prices may result in balances too low to consider using.

PED requested \$35 million for the FY17 instructional materials adoption cycle, an increase of \$10 million, which will be used to replace elementary and middle school English language arts, reading, and classical and native language materials. Citing a recent New Mexico Supreme Court ruling barring the state from purchasing textbooks for private and

parochial school students, the department also noted \$1.3 million of the current appropriation would be reallocated to school districts and charter schools next year.

Additionally, PED’s request includes a \$5.1 million increase for transportation funding. Funding has not been significantly increased in a number of years, and authorization of more state-chartered charter school transportation programs has resulted in less funding for school districts.

The department’s request for initiatives totaled \$155 million, or an increase of 53 percent. PED has said many of its requested increases will be used to provide opportunities for students and schools that requested funding this year but were denied because of limited resources. Almost a quarter of the requested increase is for K-3 Plus and prekindergarten and an additional \$10 million supports the department’s early literacy initiative, Reads to Lead.

PED is proposing five new initiatives next year, including bonuses for the top 100 teachers, a scholarship program to recruit high-quality students into the teaching field, an initiative to identify and support the most improved schools, a pot of money to support classroom teachers, and a pot of money that will allow educators to implement innovative learning strategies, such as personalized learning or competency-based learning.

Ensuring Access to Excellent Educators for All Students in

New Mexico: For decades, states with high populations of minority and low-income students have struggled to close the achievement gap. National research and anecdotal evidence from New Mexico suggests that low-income and minority students and students living in rural areas are less likely to have an effective educator than non-minority students from higher income families and students living in urban areas.

To close this educational equity gap, the United States Department of Education (USDE) required each state to submit an educator equity plan to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.

As a result, each state’s educator equity plan should focus on providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. This means ensuring that schools have the resources they need

to provide meaningful opportunities for all students to succeed.

New Mexico submitted its educator equity plan to the USDE on June 1, 2015 after analyzing statistical research, meeting with key stakeholders across the state, and committing to ensure all students in New Mexico have access to an effective educator regardless of location, income, or race. On November 18, 2015, the USDE approved the framework.

At the state level, the plan focuses on providing resources through the Public Education Department (PED) for teacher preparation, cultural competency, recruiting and retaining effective teachers, and mentorship and professional development. At the local level, each school district and charter school will incorporate their efforts to close gaps in access to effective teachers within its Web Educational Plan for Student Success, which is monitored by PED. By focusing on the specific needs of its unique population, the state is dedicated to ensuring all students have equal access to excellent educators.

Legislative Education Study Committee



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